

Senate Resolution 684

By: Senators Hill of the 32nd, Grant of the 25th, Schaefer of the 50th, Harp of the 29th,
Johnson of the 1st and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing that each year the President of the United States proclaims January 16th to be
2 national "Religious Freedom Day", this day shall also be designated Religious Freedom Day
3 in Georgia to commemorate the passage of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious
4 Freedom; and for other purposes.

5 WHEREAS, January 16th is the anniversary of the passage in 1786 of the Virginia Statute
6 for Religious Freedom which statute was drafted by President Thomas Jefferson who
7 considered it one of his greatest achievements; and

8 WHEREAS, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom ended the practice of taxing people
9 to pay for the support of the local clergy, and it protected the civil rights of people to express
10 their religious beliefs without suffering discrimination; and

11 WHEREAS, our Founding Fathers knew the importance of freedom of religion to a stable
12 and lasting Union and the drafters of the United States Constitution relied on Jefferson's
13 statute in establishing the First Amendment of the United States Constitution's guarantee of
14 religious freedom; and

15 WHEREAS, the contributions of people of faith are and have been important to our society,
16 and in order to maintain a pluralistic society we must work to ensure equal treatment of
17 faith-based organizations and people of faith without religious bigotry in any form; and

18 WHEREAS, President George H. W. Bush issued the first Religious Freedom Day
19 proclamation in 1993 recognizing that all persons should be free to follow and talk about
20 their religion; and

21 WHEREAS, President Clinton proclaimed January 16th as Religious Freedom Day annually
22 throughout his presidency; and

1 WHEREAS, President George W. Bush has annually continued this great commemoration
2 proclaiming that religious freedom is the cornerstone of our Republic, a core principle of our
3 Constitution, and a fundamental human right, and to protect these freedoms requires the
4 vigilance of the American people and of government at all levels; and

5 WHEREAS, in 2003 the United States Department of Education issued guidelines explaining
6 teachers and students' religious liberties. These guidelines outline seven forms of protected
7 freedom of speech about religion:

8 (1) Students can pray, read their Bibles, and talk about their faith at school during school
9 hours;

10 (2) Students can organize prayer groups and Bible studies and announce their meetings;

11 (3) Students can express their faith in their class work and homework;

12 (4) Teachers can organize prayer groups and Bible studies with their colleagues;

13 (5) Students may be able to go off campus to have a Bible study during school hours;

14 (6) Students can express their faith at a school event; and

15 (7) Students can express their faith at their graduation ceremony; and

16 WHEREAS, the Georgia Senate recognizes the importance that all students, educators, and
17 teachers be informed of the annual Presidential Proclamation of the Religious Freedom Day
18 and the United States Department of Education's "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected
19 Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools" issued in 2003; and

20 WHEREAS, the Georgia Senate encourages all Georgians to commemorate and celebrate
21 Religious Freedom Day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and
22 places of worship on January 16th of each year.

23 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
24 encourage all Georgia students, educators, and teachers to participate in Religious Freedom
25 Day 2006 and future such days proclaimed by the President of the United States and declare
26 January 16, 2006, to be Religious Freedom Day in Georgia.

27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
28 to transmit copies of this resolution to every school superintendent across the State of
29 Georgia and thereby request the recipient superintendents provide copies to every elementary
30 and secondary school principal in their districts.